

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 03919 210726Z

14

ACTION ORM-02

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AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 3919

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF

SUBJ: THAI POLICY ON DEPORTATION OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES

REF: BANGKOK 3554

1. IN ORDER TO GAIN CLARIFICATION OF THAI POLICY TOWARDS INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN LIGHT OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLE REGARDING FORCIBLE DEPORTATION CITED REFTEL, DCM MASTERS AND REFUGEE SECTION OFFICERS ON FEBRUARY 20 CALLED ON DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, DAMRONG SUNTHORN SARATHUN.

2. DAMRONG SAID THAT DEPORTATION APPLIES ONLY TO THOSE REFUGEES WHO ARRIVED IN THAILAND AFTER AUGUST 4, 1975, THE DATE OF AN EARLIER MOI STATEMENT THAT FURTHER INDOCHINESE REFUGEES COULD NOT BE ACCEPTED BY THAILAND. THE PRESENT POLICY PRONOUNCEMENTS, ACCORDING TO DAMRONG, ARE RESTATEMENTS OF THE RTG ANNOUNCEMENT ON AUGUST 4, 1975, THAT HENCEFORTH REFUGEES ARRIVING IN THAILAND WOULD BE CONSIDERED ILLEGAL ALIENS, NOT REFUGEES. DAMRONG WENT ON TO SAY THAT 847 REFUGEES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS HAVING ARRIVED SINCE AUGUST 4 AND ARE EITHER IN JAIL OR BEING PROCESSED BY THE THAI COURTS FOR POSSIBLE DEPORTATION. HOWEVER, DAMRONG STRESSED THAT THE AGREEMENT OF THE CAMBODIAN AND LAO
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 03919 210726Z

GOVERNMENTS WILL BE NECESSARY BEFORE REFUGEES CAN BE REPATRIATED

AND THAT THE RTG WANTS INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES SUCH AS THE ICRC TO "LOOK AFTER THE SAFETY" OF REFUGEES WHO ARE RETURNED TO THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN. THE MATTER WILL PROBABLY BE TAKEN UP FIRST WITH THE CAMBODIANS IF A CHATCHAI MEETING WITH IENG SARY TAKES PLACE LATER THIS MONTH. NO DISCUSSIONS ARE YET SLATED WITH THE LAO AUTHORITIES AND DAMRONG INDICATED THAT SINCE THERE ARE NO RELATIONS BETWEEN THAILAND AND VIETNAM, THE PROSPECT OF REPATRIATION TO VIETNAM IS AT THIS POINT THEORETICAL. HOWEVER, REFUGEES ARRIVING BY BOAT IN THAILAND (PRIMARILY VIETNAMESE) WILL HENCEFORTH, ACCORDING TO DAMRONG, BE REPROVISIONED AND SENT OUT TO SEA.

3. DCM SAID HE WAS GRATIFIED TO LEARN THAT THE RTG DID NOT CONTEMPLATE RETURNING REFUGEES AGAINST THEIR WILL TO POTENTIALLY HOSTILE AUTHORITIES. THE DCM SAID THAT, AS REPORTED IN THE PRESS, THE USG WOULD HOPEFULLY BE ASSISTING RTG IN NEAR FUTURE BY TAKING ADDITIONAL REFUGEES, IF PAROLE AUTHORITY WAS APPROVED BY CONGRESS.

4. EMBASSY COMMENT: DAMRONG CONFIRMED THAT THE DEPORTATION ISSUE WAS CONSIDERED BY RTG CABINET ON FEBRUARY 17 AT REGULAR WEEKLY SESSION. UNDERLYING TONE OF DAMRONG'S REMARKS AND SEVERAL EXPLICIT STATEMENTS INDICATE THAT RTG REITERATION OF DEPORTATION POLICY AT THIS TIME IS PRIMARILY DESIGNED TO REDUCE THE FLOW OF REFUGEES COMING TO THAILAND. (OTHER SOURCES SAY SOME 500 ARE STILL ENTERING THAILAND WEEKLY, AND THE POTENTIAL FOR LARGE REFUGEE MOVEMENTS IS TREMENDOUS WHEN AND IF COMMUNIST AUTHORITIES IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA CLAMP DOWN FURTHER.) INDEED BY NARROWING THE APPLICABILITY OF THE DEPORTATION POLICY TO 847 REFUGEES, THE RTG IS IGNORING THOUSANDS OF OTHERS WHO HAVE ARRIVED IN THAILAND SINCE THAT TIME. THUS, THE THAI ARE RE-STATING A POLICY THAT THEY WILL APPLY PRESENTLY ONLY TO A LIMITED NUMBER OF REFUGEES.

5. DCM PRESSED DAMRONG ON RTG PLANS OR THE BULK OF THE REFUGEES WHO ARRIVED HERE BEFORE AUGUST 4. DAMRONG SAID THAT THERE IS STILL "NO LONG RANGE PLAN" AND THAT HE COULD NOT OFFER ANYREPLY TO THE QUESTION OF THE PROSPECTS FOR RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES IN THAILAND. DCM NOTED THAT IF WE HAD A CLEAR IDEA OF WHICH REFUGEES THE THAI FELT THEY COULD RSETLLE, THE U.S. CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 03919 210726Z

AND OTHER COUNTRIES MIGHT CONCENTRATE ON ACCEPTING REFUGEES WHO CANNOT BE PERMANENTLY RESETTLED IN THAILAND. HOWEVER, DAMRONG COULD NOT OFFER ANY SPECIFICS EXCEPT THAT THAI DAM MIGHT RT MIGHT BE RESETTLEABLE IN SOUTHERN THAILAND AND THAT HE HOPED THIRD COUNTRIES WOULD TAKE ALL REFUGEES WHO HAD BEEN IN THE ARMED FORCES SINCE HE DOES NOT BELIEVE THEY CAN RETURN UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. IN ADDITION TO THE EFFORT TO DISCOURAGE ADDITIONAL REFUGEES, SURFACING OF THIS ISSUE BY THE RTG IS

AIMED AT DOMESTIC THAI AUDIENCE DURING ELECTION CAMPAIGN PERIOD.
IT IS NOT YET WIDELY UNDERSTOOD THAT THE POLICY ACTUALLY APPLIES
TO A SMALL NUMBER OF REFUGEES AND THAT ACUTAL DEPORTATION OF
ANY REFUGEES REMAINS AT THIS POINT FAIRLY REMOTE.

7. TO SOME EXTENT, THE THAI MAY BE RAISING THE ISSUE TO TEST
INTERNATIONAL OPINION, AND WE ARE PLEASED THAT UNHCR HERE HAS
TAKEN A STRONG LEAD IN PROTESTING THS EVOLUTION IN THAI REFUGEE
POLICY. DAMRONG'S VIEWS ARE SIMILAR TO PLAYBACK BEING GIVEN
TO UNHCR BY THAI MINISTRIES OF INTERIOR AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS.
UNHCR DIRECTOR BERTA HAS BEEN ENERGETICALLY PURSUING THIS WITH
THE RTG, AND WE ARE ENCOURAGING HIM TO CONTINUE TO TAKE THE
LEAD.

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